

CHRB NEWS & REVIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

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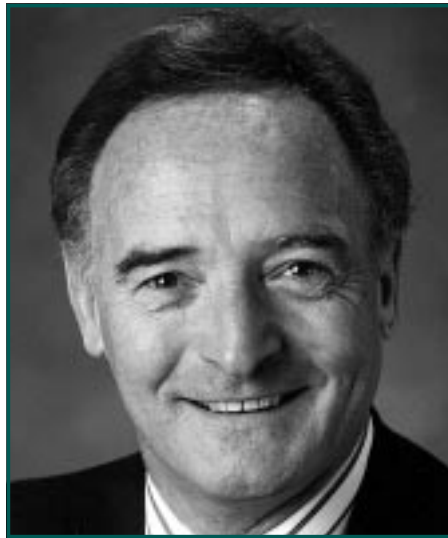
ISSUE 10

Valpredo Concludes 7 Years of Service

Horse racing fans and the entire industry owe a lot to Donald Valpredo, who is leaving the California Horse Racing Board after nearly seven years of service as a commissioner, including five years as vice-chairman.

Due to Valpredo's dogged persistence, the post times for races run throughout California are staggered, so that live races and simulcast races aren't run at the same time.

Thanks largely to Valpredo and some of the other racing commissioners, the colors of saddlecloths worn by horses in a race are the same at all California tracks, based on post positions,



DONALD VALPREDO

so that simulcast fans can easily identify the horses in any race.

And because of Valpredo, fans are permitted to observe the inquiry process while it is in progress, watching along on the closed-circuit monitors as the stewards review replays of the race.

Field sizes in California are no longer shrinking, and in some places they actually are getting larger, again due in part to Valpredo's insistence that tracks limit the number of races they run during a meet.

As Chairman of the CHRB's Stewards' Committee, Valpredo did his best

(Continued on page 11)

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During my 25 years in horse racing — first as an owner, then as a farm manager, horse identifier, trainer, steward, and now a regulator—I never have come across anything more encouraging and promising for our industry than the National Thoroughbred Racing Association.

There are numerous critics within our industry, and admittedly there is much worthy of criticism, but up until now there have not been many workable solutions presented for making things right. Most suggested improvements are vaguely worded, incomplete, only partially conceived, and often unattainable.

But now comes the NTRA! Here at last is something concrete, something carefully thought out; and best of all, it already enjoys broad support.

After all, what other unity plan ever got racing fans to pony up \$50 apiece to help ensure its success? That's what members of the Southern California Fans Committee did, as detailed in the **Be Our Guest** column inside this newsletter.

Probably not everything about the NTRA is perfect, and not everything will work, but at least people are stepping up to the plate and devoting considerable time, effort, and resources to its development.

For the first time in history, we have a realistic opportunity to create a workable national alliance covering all facets of horse racing.

In the months ahead, the creative minds in the NTRA are expected to come up with new, innovative ideas for putting horse racing back on the right track. Some of those ideas might be difficult to support. That will be the time for the rest of us to step up to the plate.

Anyone who truly cares about horse racing should get solidly behind the NTRA. It's our best chance yet.

Roy C. Wood, Jr.
Roy C. Wood, Jr.



IN THE GOLDEN STATE

CHRB DEVELOPS HORSEMEN'S HANDBOOK CONCERNING MEDICATION RULES AND REGULATIONS

Easy-to-read pamphlet will be of particular use to visiting horsemen who are unfamiliar with California's rules and regulations pertaining to restrictions and permitted medications for racehorses.

The California Horse Racing Board has developed a 22-page pamphlet titled the "Horsemen's Handbook Concerning Medication Rules and Regulations," which is available at all Board offices and by mail, free of charge.

The handbook amplifies and interprets those CHRB rules and regulations dealing with the medication of racehorses. It is the intent of the booklet to provide participants in the horse racing industry with assistance in complying with those rules.

The publication is meant to answer most questions concerning medication rules and procedures in California, though the pamphlet's foreword cautions readers that it "should not preclude the clarification of rules and questions with the official veterinarian or the practicing veterinarian you employ on medication rules and issues."

The foreword goes on to say: "It is the objective of the CHRB medication rules and regulations to protect the integrity of horse racing, to guard the health of the horse, and to safeguard the interests of the public and the racing participants through the prohibition or control of all drug substances, medication, or other substances that might be administered to a racehorse."

The handbook breaks down and organizes the rules and regulations into sections with simplified headings, which include:

TRAINER RESPONSIBILITY

- PROHIBITED DRUG SUBSTANCES
- AUTHORIZED DRUG SUBSTANCES AND LIMITATIONS
- REQUIREMENTS FOR TEST SAMPLES
- SPLIT-SAMPLE PROGRAM
- BLEEDER TREATMENT

Of special interest is the section RACE-DAY ROUTINE,

which takes readers through the process of pre-race examinations, activities at the receiving barn, and procedures for scratching horses from races.

The handbook also lists all 7 classes of drug substances, as defined by CHRB regulations, and provides examples of substances within those classifications.

Even alternate forms of therapy, such as acupuncture, are dealt with in the publication, along with the citing of rules and regulations relating to veterinary practice.



CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

- 19 – CHRB committee meetings in Arcadia.
- 20 – CHRB monthly meeting in Arcadia.

MARCH

- 6 – AQHA convention begins in Anaheim.
- 19 – CHRB committee meetings in Arcadia.
- 20 – CHRB monthly meeting in Arcadia.

APRIL

- 1 – Golden Gate Fields thoroughbred meet opens.
- 10 – Cal-Expo harness meet opens.
- 17 – Los Alamitos quarterhorse meet opens.
- 24 – CHRB committee meetings in Inglewood.
- 24 – CHRB monthly meeting in Inglewood.
- 24 – Hollywood Park thoroughbred meet opens.

One of Racing's Brightest Stars Retires

During his 30-plus years in horse racing, Nat Wess worked mostly behind the scenes to help establish California as one of the finest racing jurisdictions in the world. While serving as general manager of the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association, he helped develop and establish the California Cup, one of the state's biggest success stories.



NAT WESS

Nat Wess is retiring. Moving to Minneapolis. Hopes to enjoy life at the respectable age of 58.

Says he wants to spend more time with his family. Plans to travel with his wife, Ellen, to dreamed-of places like France and England. But most of all, he wants to slow down and take life easy.

Suuuure. We believe that Nat Wess can slow down — **NOT!**

This is a guy who always moves at twice the speed of anyone else. For him, life is a perpetual foot-race. He even eats on the run.

Wess is known for 30-second telephone conversations. That's sufficient time for his trademark opening wise-crack, then a quick tending to business. Click.

His brain operates like a nuclear accelerator. You can see it in his eyes — flitting and darting about, framed by ever-present glasses.

His metabolism rate is off the scale. That's one reason he's so thin. And, yes, he did have a heart problem a few years back — another reason he wants to slow down. He feels great right now and the doctors say he's completely recovered, but there's no sense in pushing things too far. He wants to see his grandchildren grow up.

We all wish him the very best of luck and a long, happy retirement. Still, it is hard to believe that someone with racing in his blood can just walk away from it all, cold turkey.

"Nat was high-energy, always ready to do something...a self-starter."

Biff Lowry

Nathaniel Wess was just a kid when his uncle started taking him to the races, usually on Saturdays. The youngster saw all of Swaps' 18 California races from 1954 to 1956. He started going to the races on his own when he was a senior at Venice High, not far from Hollywood Park.

With a talent for writing and a strong interest in horse racing, Wess dreamed of becoming a turf writer like some of his idols, Charles Hatton, Oscar Otis, and Joe Hirsch. So, after he finished college, he found jobs at small local newspapers reporting on everything from general news to high school athletics, and when he could swing it, he covered races at Hollywood Park.

By now, Wess was married and had a six-month-old daughter, so his next step was very difficult to make.

"I had a chance to join the publicity department at Santa Anita, but it was a seasonal job with no guarantee for work after the meet ended," explained Wess. "I said it all to Ellen and she just said, 'Go for it!'"

"Well, I did find work in racing after that meet, then after the next one, then the next, and I've been working fairly steady ever since. It was the best decision I — *WE* — ever made."

Wess' career followed a predictable pattern after that. One opening led to another, one promotion to another, as he moved around the state to various racetracks in the thoroughbred and harness industries.

"He was high-energy, always ready to do something," said Biff Lowry, who was director of publicity at the Western Harness Association at the time. "You never had to crack the whip with Nat. He was a self-starter."

Eventually, Wess worked his way up through the ranks to become director of publicity at Hollywood Park — the very place where he had seen Swaps win his career debut two decades earlier.

"Racing was a fun place to be working in those days," said Wess. "You never knew who was going to come into town for a big race. When horses like Cox's Ridge and Fort Marcy shipped in for a race, all you had to do was pick up the phone and alert the media. The next morning, a television crew was in the backstretch with the horse, and columnists were writing about those horses. Racing was a

(Continued on page 10)



Mostly Work and Little Play for Fans Committee Members

Millions of people consider themselves racing fans. But some take things more seriously than others. Some even join committees to help improve and preserve the sport they love so much.

A dozen of the most committed racing enthusiasts in the state formed the Southern California Horse Racing Industry Fans Committee back in 1993, and they are still going strong today as they work with track management and other industry leaders on matters of mutual concern.

The committee has contributed in important ways in such areas as patron relations operations, the content and format of official programs, the content and composition of simulcast signals, and the review and evaluation of pro-

posed additional wagers.

As Committee Chairman David Pascale (seated fourth from right above) explains in the Guest Editorial on the adjoining page, the committee even gets involved in national matters relating to the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and proposed legislation.

Others who attended a recent meeting at Santa Anita, as pictured above, are clockwise from left: Biff Lowry (who is director of patron relations for the southern simulcast organization and serves the committee in an advisory capacity), Bob Malconian, Jerry Abramson, Michael Peterson, Al Christofano (standing), (Pascale), Duke Freyermuth (partially hidden), Vicki Vinson, and Gillian Hyde.

Comings and Goings at the California Horse Racing Board

There are plenty of new faces in the CHRB, especially at the headquarters office in Sacramento, while some others have moved on. Still others have just changed desks.

Nancy Ross joined the CHRB as executive secretary on January 5. Janet Bandy, longtime executive secretary at the Board, transferred to the Policy and Regulations Unit effective February 1. Janet spent three weeks helping Nancy get familiar with her new duties, which include handling correspondence and other matters for Executive Director Roy Wood.

Ed Stetson, who spent nearly 20 years with the Board, retired December 30 from his position of supervising special investigator.

Marlene Valencia, who was hired as an office assistant in November, transferred January 5 to the Licensing Unit to replace Tina Bernard, who moved to Idaho and separated from

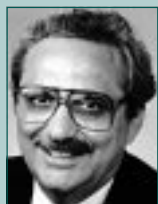
State service. Doris Ward joined the staff January 6 as an office assistant at the reception desk, replacing Marlene.

Mory Atashkar, head of the Management Information Systems Unit, was promoted to senior programmer analyst (specialist).

Wendy Voss of the Administration Unit and Patricia Noble of Policy and Regulations both were promoted to the position of associate governmental program analyst in September, while Jacqueline Wagner of Policy and Regulations was promoted to staff services manager I and Paige Noble, director of Administration, was promoted to staff services manager II.



BE OUR GUEST...



The California Horse Racing Board believes the best way to regulate an industry is to be fully informed. The CHRB regularly solicits input from the public and the horse racing industry, and this guest editorial page is one more forum for that purpose.

This guest editorial is provided by David Pascale, associate executive director of the Los Angeles County Bar Association, who is chairman of the Southern California Fans Committee and a member of both the CHRB Simulcast Advisory Committee and the Industry Advisory Committee.

“If this one doesn’t work, then it’s every man for himself, and we should stop talking about unity and being at any ‘crossroads.’ We’ll have to admit John Brunetti was right...it’s not a national game.”

That was my remark to another attendee at the recent Arizona Racing Symposium after listening to an impressive presentation of findings, goals, and plans regarding the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA).

On the flight home, I thought of previous attempts at unity. All of them fizzled, including the Commissioner’s Office (of the Thoroughbred Racing Associations), the Marketing and Media Project (of the Horsemen’s Benevolent and Protective Association), and the Tri-State Marketing Plan. I also recalled reading about Col. Matt Winn’s appeal for national unity in **June 1945**.

But the NTRA approach is notably different. For one thing, it was developed as an “alliance” from the start, giving it broader industry support than the others.

Two days after the symposium, the Southern California Fans Committee met in a Hollywood Park conference room. Members departed from the established agenda to devote nearly two hours discussing the NTRA, including a review of materials distributed at the symposium and recent articles concerning the NTRA. The committee focused on two questions: Is the NTRA a good idea? If so, how can we help?

The group answered the first question in the affirmative and voted unanimously to: 1) Pledge up to \$50 per member for a “Club” membership, as outlined in the NTRA Business Plan, and 2) volunteer its assistance to NTRA staff and consultants as a focus group.

Specifically, the committee believes its members’ combined experience and love of the sport would be useful to the NTRA in pursuing some of the strategies outlined in the NTRA Business Plan. Of special concern are fan education, patron relations, and customer retention.

The Fans Committee was formed in 1993 as an adjunct

to the now defunct California Horse Racing Industry Coalition. Although the coalition dissolved, the Fans Committee continued working with industry leaders. Its members represent a cross-section of racing enthusiasts. None has any connection with any segment of the horse industry, other than their interest in and love for the game. The committee’s self-defined role is to apply whatever resources it has to “contribute to the health, survival, and growth of the industry.”

Members also discussed S. 474, authored by Senator John Kyl, which was intended to regulate gambling on the Internet, but is currently worded so broadly that it would threaten existing simulcast wagering programs that cross state lines, and it would preclude future technological applications crucial to the industry’s growth.

The committee believes that the NTRA represents the best and very likely *last* chance at national unity for a fragmented industry. Should the Kyl bill pass in its current form, there is virtually **no** chance. Hence, the committee voted to register its opposition to the bill with California’s elected representatives in Washington.

I won’t attempt to compose a rallying cry for industry action to oppose the bill. Stan Bergstein, whom I view as the Eric Severeid of racing, has already done so in his typically masterful fashion. Therefore, I refer those interested to the Dec. 27, 1997, edition of *The Blood-Horse*, page 7347 (The Final Turn).

So, the industry faces two unprecedented, related challenges. And it seems that whether the industry’s base of core patrons is 6 million, as the NTRA suggests, or 16 million, as reported at the 1997 Jockey Club Round Table, many of those customers would like to help the industry achieve both goals. At the very least, they can be asked to communicate with their congressional representatives.

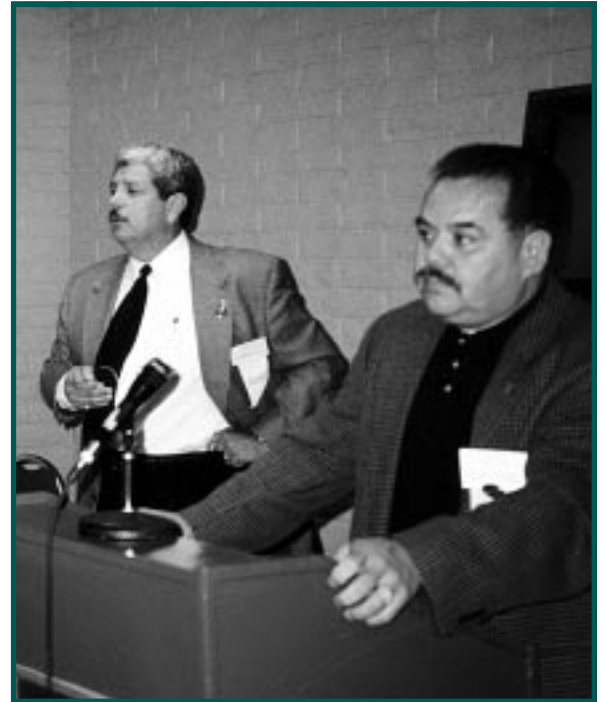
Industry leaders have a valuable resource at their disposal. They should find ways to let the public help. Often, the inmates have good ideas on how to run the asylum.



FBI SPECIAL AGENT BOB HAMER emerged as a strong favorite among the featured speakers at the recent conference of the Organization of Racing Investigators, a three-day gathering hosted by the CHRB.

DR. SCOTT STANLEY (center left) advised the group about new developments in drug-testing methods.

CHRB INVESTIGATOR FRANK MESQUITA (below, far right) shared information relating to narcotics investigations, with input from CHRB Chief Investigator Bob Nieto (to his right).



SHARING INFORMATION -- Among those who gathered in Arcadia for the ORI conference were (from left): Bob Nieto, CHRB chief investigator; Benny C. Lovett, director of law enforcement, Oklahoma Racing Commission; Roy Minami, CHRB assistant executive director; Roy Wood, CHRB executive director; John T. Williams, director of enforcement, Texas Racing Commission; Dick Smith, director of security, Santa Anita Park, and Steve Lump, chief investigator, Arizona Department of Racing.

Horse Racing Investigators Meet in Arcadia

The CHRB was pleased to host this year's annual conference of the Organization of Racing Investigators and to share information with other jurisdictions about the CHRB's Integrity of Racing Program.



CLIFF GOODRICH

"The integrity of the game means everything. If we lose that, we lose everything."

Those opening words from Clifford Goodrich, president of Santa Anita Park, put into sharp focus the purpose and theme of the recent conference of the Organization of Racing Investigators (ORI). Hosted by the CHRB, the three-day conference brought together more than 70 investigators and officials from 15 horse racing jurisdictions throughout the United States.

The ORI was formed in 1990 as one way for investigators from different areas to get to know one another and to share information. The conference is held in a different part of the country each year. The typical agenda includes presentations of interest to those responsible for enforcing laws and regulations and for protecting the integrity of horse racing.

Goodrich was among the first speakers at the Feb. 10-12 conference in Arcadia. He acknowledged the importance of the work performed by investigators and other security personnel at racetracks, then he mentioned a distressing trend in this country.

"All tracks are cutting expenses as they take a closer look at their bottom line," said Goodrich, "and some are cutting back in security areas, such as participation in the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau, which provides valuable access to a centralized data base. This is dangerous territory!"

"Some of the responsibility for correcting this trend lies with each of you, the investigators," he continued. "When you return home, you need to make people like me more aware of your daily activities, more aware of the impact of the decisions they are making, more aware of the potential impact of their decisions on the integrity of racing."

Joining Goodrich for opening remarks were Roy Minami, assistant executive director of the CHRB; Bob Nieto, chief investigator for the CHRB; and Ronnie Garner, chief of the Arcadia Police Department. As the conference progressed, these officials, along with Roy Wood, executive director of the CHRB, also participated in presentations.

Drugs were a major topic during the conference. Frank Mesquita, a senior special investigator with the CHRB, spoke about narcotics use among racing personnel, and he

discussed some of the successful techniques used by the CHRB to identify drug users and to apprehend suspected drug sellers. Then Don Murray, executive director of the Winners Foundation, discussed the drug rehabilitation program within the horse racing industry.

Dr. Scott Stanley of the Equine Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of California, Davis, shifted the focus to drug testing of equine athletes. He discussed the increasingly sophisticated and sensitive testing equipment being used to analyze post-race blood and urine samples.

Bob Hamer, a special agent with the FBI, discussed the joint investigation conducted by his agency and the CHRB into race fixing and bribery allegations, which led to the convictions of two individuals, jockey Richard Pfau and bettor Richard Sklar, on charges of sports bribery.

Hamer indicated that simulcasting and common-pooling between racetracks and race books in Nevada has taken away much of the incentive for individuals to attempt to influence the outcome of races. He pointed out that any money wagered with participating race books will show up in the wagering pools at racetracks and drive down the odds, so the opportunity to make significant profits through shady dealings has been greatly reduced.

Other presentations were made by Carl Olsen, senior field supervisor for the National Indian Gaming Commission; Pete Platt, a special agent with the IRS; Rod Sprague, a senior sales consultant with Roche Diagnostic Systems; Dan Stegemann, director of surveillance at Hollywood Park Casino; Barclay Porter, simulcasting coordinator for Hollywood Park; Betsy Willis, diversion program manager for the Drug Enforcement Agency; and Bruce Smith, an agent with the Arcadia Police Department.

Contributing to the success of the conference with donations and/or services were the Southern California Fraternal Order of Police, the Winners Foundation, the California Thoroughbred Trainers, and Santa Anita Park.





TERRY MARTIN

THE ANSWER MAN

The CHRB's Winner's Circle Award recognizes the special contributions of staff members.

News & Review editor Mike Marten interviewed the latest recipient, Terry Martin.

Terry Martin was one of the first people ever to use the Internet, but he didn't know it at the time. That was back in 1982 at Osan Air Force Base in South Korea, where he served as a computer specialist working within the military's worldwide command and control system.

"The system was one part of the beginning of the Internet, only we didn't think of it as that," explained Martin. "For us, it was just a way of disseminating information."

Fast-forward 16 years and we find Martin, at the age of 37, applying his considerable skills in the horse racing industry as an associate programmer analyst with the CHRB.

Thousands of horse owners and others who work in the industry benefit from Martin's involvement, only they don't realize it, either. Nowadays, their license applications are processed much faster than they were just a few years ago. And it only takes seconds to provide licensees with information they need from the computer.

All of this makes life easier for the CHRB license technicians, as well. Fewer delays mean happier customers, smiles instead of frowns, thank-yous instead of complaints.

"When we have a problem with the computer, we call Terry and he takes care of it right away," said Norma Williams, the licensing supervisor in Southern California. "He listens, asks a few questions, then tells us exactly where the problem is and how to fix it. Just like that, we're up and running again, and the licensees don't have to wait all day for what they need."

Laura Sandoval, a license tech at Los Alamitos Race Course, which operates at night, said the time of day doesn't matter to Terry: "When we need help, we can count on him, 24 hours a day."

With endorsements like these, it's no surprise that Martin recently was selected by his fellow workers to receive the Winner's Circle Award, which is

given twice a year in recognition of outstanding performances by CHRB employees.

"I can't believe it," said a surprised Martin, whose dark beard and deep voice belie his gentle nature. "This really means something to me because, well, the CHRB is such a small agency and the staff works so well together, it's more like a family. It's fulfilling to be recognized as a helpful member of the family."

Go back 20 years and we find Martin making the career choice that would eventually lead him to the CHRB. This occurred in the small town of Angel's Camp, in the heart of the Sierra Nevada, where he grew up.

"I saw lots of people go off to school, then come back years later, not much better for the experience," recalled Martin. "I also saw people join the Army and drive trucks, then they were unemployed when they got out because there aren't many jobs for truck drivers."

"Me, I got out the newspaper want-ads and checked the job listings. I saw there were lots of jobs for people who knew computers, and those jobs paid well, so I went to my Air Force recruiter and enlisted as a computer specialist. They put me through computer programming school in Biloxi, Mississippi, where I learned the most important programming languages, and that was the start of my career in computers."

After serving four years in the military, Martin easily found work with the Northern California Grocers Association in Sacramento, where he was involved in accounting, payrolls, inventories, and identification-card processing.

"That was a great place to work because they were constantly upgrading their systems and they kept putting me through training in order to keep up with the latest technology," explained Martin. "We were never behind the curve."

Martin became involved with California government in 1986 when he did some consulting work for the Department of Consumer Affairs. That experience led to contracts with other state agencies until 1995, when he was hired to help the CHRB play catch-up in the use of computer technology.

"While working with some of the larger state agencies, I was exposed to people who were up-to-date on current technology and techniques," said Martin, "and what I learned from them I was able to bring to the CHRB.

Recognizing Martin's contributions, Paige Noble, the CHRB's chief of administration, and Mory Atashkar, the CHRB's chief information officer, jointly nominated him for the Winner's Circle Award.

"Terry's dedication and commit-

ment to his difficult work has resulted in great enhancements (at the Board)," they related in his nomination letter. "Melded with Terry's technical abilities and his excellent interpersonal skills, Terry's ability to logically approach and solve problems, not to mention his easygoing nature, has enabled him to establish good rapport and trust among CHRB staff and the racing industry."

Working with Atashkar, who is the head of the CHRB's Management Information Systems unit, one of Martin's first assignments was to help give the Board's computer system the capability of performing the Year 2000 calculation.

"You probably have read about how the Year 2000 calculation is a problem being faced by businesses and govern-

ments throughout the world as the year 2000 approaches," said Martin. "Well, because the CHRB issues some three-year licenses, we needed to solve this problem back in 1996. That's behind us now, so we are concentrating on other things.

"Mory Atashkar is a great mentor. I've learned a lot from him," explained Martin. "Together, we're helping improve the licensing process by introducing bar-coded 'smart cards' and by replacing photo IDs with computer imaging.

"We're designing a merchant transaction system at each CHRB field office that will provide licensees with the ability to pay their occupational license fees with a credit card. And we're connecting the stewards, investigators, and other personnel in field offices with direct communication links to Sacramento.

"We're here to bring the latest tools to people's desks — to make things a lot easier through automation."



THAN SAGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN Dr Dennis Meagher left as honored the CHRB staff for his services as acting executive director Meagher as served the role in attending the unexpected death of Dr Robert MacFarlane for one year until a replacement executive director was appointed last November The new EMD is Dr Ronald Jensen right

Serving as EMD as nothing new for Meagher who was the very first person to fill that position when it was created in conjunction with the University of California at Davis here Meagher as a faculty member in the School of Veterinary Medicine's Department of Surgery and Radiology Meagher served as EMD a second time in He later retired from the university to take a sabbatical of retirement to serve a third time as EMD In recognition of the sacrifices of both Meagher and his wife Helen the CHRB staff honored the both and the presented Meagher with an engraved clock encased in cherry wood

Articles and photographs appropriate for CHRB News & Review may be submitted to

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really big thing, and I loved being a part of it.”

Wess left Hollywood Park in 1983 to get involved in a number of personal projects, one of which was far ahead of its time. He worked with a tribe of Indians who wanted to open a racetrack in Oklahoma. That was long before the explosion of Indian gaming centers throughout North America.

In 1984, Wess took the opportunity to get back into race-track management when he was offered the job of assistant general manager of Canterbury Downs, the new racetrack outside of Minneapolis. That was when he and Ellen fell in love with Minnesota — with the slower lifestyle, the cleaner air, the Midwest sensibility.

BACK TO CALIFORNIA

With some reluctance, they moved back to California in 1988 when Nat accepted the position of general manager of the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association. It was an offer he couldn't refuse.

He had the chance to work with longtime California breeder Ken Schiffer, a director and former president of the CTBA, and a close friend of the family. The job brought Wess back to his roots, back to California horse racing.

And most importantly, Wess had the opportunity to work on a ground-breaking project, something with the potential to forever change and improve the California thoroughbred breeding industry. Working closely with then-CTBA President Donald Valpredo, Wess played a critical role in developing and establishing the California Cup — a single day of racing each year celebrating the Cal-bred, offering \$1 million in total purses for horses bred in the state.

Tracy Gantz, former managing editor of the CTBA's *Thoroughbred of California* magazine, worked with Wess for seven years, and recalls those early days of the Cal Cup.

“One of the key aspects of the California Cup has been its large, competitive fields, and Nat was instrumental in getting that off on the correct foot,” said Gantz. “He was constantly on the backstretch talking to trainers, convincing them of the importance of the Cal Cup, and explaining why they and their horses should be a part of it.”

CAREER HIGHLIGHT

Since its first running in 1990, the Cal Cup has been an unqualified success, a fixture of the Oak Tree meeting at Santa Anita Park, marked by quality racing, huge attendance, social affairs, awards banquets, and a spirit of cooperation and togetherness that seldom is experienced in California horse racing nowadays.

“In my whole career, the Cal Cup is one of the things I am most proud of,” said Wess. “The Cal Cup and programs like it are vital to the success of horse racing in California. I don't have all the answers to our problems, but I do know that

“He's one of those 110-percent guys, one of a kind.”

Bob Benoit

horses shipping in from other states are not going to fill our races, are not going to be the long-term solution. We need Cal-breds, and plenty of them, to fill our cards, so a strong breeding industry is essential to the survival of racing, and the Cal Cup is one of the programs helping to build a strong breeding industry.

“One other thing about Cal Cup: It's a special day for racing, a once-a-year thing that fans and people in the industry can look forward to and enjoy together.”

Wess remained with the CTBA through mid-1995, when he accepted his current position as vice-president at Bay Meadows, allowing him to work with his longtime friend and CTBA associate Jack Liebau, the track president.

Wess' inexhaustible energy and hands-on approach to all aspects of track operations make him the go-to guy with questions and problems. His telephone rings incessantly. He spends most of the day on his feet, scurrying around the track, seemingly the first to know about any development at Bay Meadows or, for that matter, racing anywhere in the state.

And this is the man who plans to retire, slow down, take life easy?

“Nobody believes I can do it,” said Wess, “but believe me, Ellen and I have a laundry list of things we want to do. We'll keep busy. But if I'm wrong, if I do get bored, well, I'm sure I can find ways to be part of the game — as a consultant, maybe, or perhaps a newsletter. I've got ideas that I might pursue somewhere down the road.”

Bob Benoit, the former Hollywood Park executive who worked with Wess for 14 years, had this to say about his close friend and colleague: “His loyalty and dedication to the task were unmatched. He's one of those 110-percent guys, one-of-a-kind.”



***Please help us enforce
California's racing rules.
Call (800) 805-7223 to
report any violations.***

to ensure that stewards throughout the state perform their duties in a fair and consistent manner.

It was Valpredo who personally redrafted the language of the CHRB rules governing the construction and use of whips. Since being approved by the full Board, those amended rules have led to numerous disciplinary actions by the stewards against jockeys for abusing their mounts.

SPARKED CHANGE OF PHILOSOPHY

Prior to Valpredo's appointment to the CHRB by Governor Pete Wilson on May 13, 1991, the prevailing philosophy among commissioners was to let the business people in racing make the business decisions. Certainly, the Board regulated racing, set broad policies, and protected the public, but commissioners usually let racing executives handle the smaller details of racetrack operations, such as setting post times and wagering menus.

Things started to change somewhat before Valpredo's arrival. Ralph Scurfield, who joined the Board four months ahead of Valpredo, already was demonstrating a keen interest in all aspects of horse racing and providing the kind of leadership that would soon lead to his election as Chairman of the Board — a position that Scurfield holds to this day.

But Valpredo was boldly determined to get the Board much more involved in improving the daily operations of racetracks. He was especially interested in getting input from racing fans.

"Don was our racing knowledge person. It will be difficult to find somebody with his interest and expertise."

Ralph Scurfield

Valpredo was the right man at the right time. As the son of a leading breeder, and a successful thoroughbred owner-breeder himself, he brought a level of knowledge to the Board that instantly won him the respect of other commissioners. He worked hard at the job — sometimes putting more hours into this work than into his own farming business — and he spent considerable time at racetracks and simulcast facilities, hearing from fans and coming up with ideas for improving the industry.

Racing executives sometimes resisted Valpredo's ideas. Some balked at coordinating post times between tracks in California. Others stalled at coordinating saddlecloths. But with support from the other commissioners, Valpredo eventually prevailed.

Sometimes his ideas were so good, so undeniably appropriate, that racetracks implemented them with full support

"Don brought to the Board a fresh perspective...and provided the wisdom and sound judgment necessary to make tough decisions..."

Senator Ken Maddy

and zeal. Santa Anita Park and Los Alamitos Race Course, for example, enthusiastically volunteered to be part of the pilot program for showing the stewards' inquiry process live to the public.

With Valpredo and Scurfield leading the way, new commissioners coming onto the Board readily adopted the new philosophy. George Nicholaw, for example, as chairman of the CHRB Pari-Mutuel Operations Committee, has been a tireless advocate for fans in matters such as standardizing wagers at all facilities in California. It was Nicholaw who succeeded in giving bettors the opportunity to choose alternate selections for scratched horses in the Pick 6.

LONG-LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS

Today, it is common for racing commissioners to scrutinize virtually all aspects of the industry, especially racetrack operations. Because Valpredo was responsible in part for bringing about this change of philosophy, his actions will benefit fans and the California horse racing industry for years to come.

"He will be tremendously missed by the Board, and I feel like I am losing a good friend and confidante," said Scurfield, who worked closely with Valpredo on various two-person committees dealing with budgets, legislation, racing dates, and personnel matters. "Most of us on the Board can be judicious, and we each bring some valuable experience to the job. Don was our racing knowledge person. It will be difficult to find somebody with his interest and expertise."

State Senator Ken Maddy, an expert on horse-racing matters who also worked closely with Valpredo, said, "Don Valpredo is a great California horseman who has served with distinction on the California Horse Racing Board.

"As an owner and breeder of Thoroughbred horses, Don brought to the Board a fresh perspective, which to that point, had been underrepresented. He provided the wisdom and sound judgment necessary to make tough decisions on cutting-edge issues. Californians have been privileged to have such a fine, dedicated person representing their interests on the Board."



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